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Carmita Goes to School

The Woman's Board of Home Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A., 156 Fifth Ave., New York City

Carmita Goes to School

CARMITA lives in a palm-tree country by the sea, where it is always summer. She spends most of her time in the beautiful out-of-doors, where gorgeous flowers that we may see in winter only in greenhouses, grow wild on the hills and by the wayside. There are lilies and cannas and magnificent poinsettias and hibiscus and funny twisted plants of many colors.

It is well that Carmita can live in the open air, for her palm-tree house is very small indeed, and there are ten little brothers and sisters to share it with her.

A very wonderful thing happened yesterday, and this is a great day for Carmita. She

is going to the American school, where she may learn "English" and sing a great deal and have altogether a beautiful time. She had heard about it from other children, so that when a lovely lady came yesterday to the little palm-tree house and asked that the little girl might come to her school, Carmita's heart thumped wildly and her dark eyes sparkled with excitement. Would her mother say "yes" or "no?" She said "*yes*," and so this morning after great washings and dressings and combings, little Carmita goes to school.

The large, clean and bright school room is wonderful to Carmita; all the sights and sounds are most new and interesting. It will not be long before her quick little mind will understand them. She watches one little boy. He knows hardly any English, but makes frantic efforts to understand his teacher; while the teacher wildly guesses as to what he says or means to say. He is an eager little pupil, and will surely "have the English" soon.

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These Porto Rican children are generally shining examples of grace and politeness; there is a troubled little chap at a desk near Carmita. *"Why?"* Carmita wonders. *Because,* a blot of ink has fallen on the little fellow's examination paper! What shall he do about it? Presently he thinks what to do—he carefully writes above the blot "Excuse me," then passes in his paper.

A door opens and another teacher comes into the room. Immediately there is a stir among the children. Their bright faces are very smiling. "What is going to happen now?" thinks Carmita. "La Señorita is coming to tell us a story in Spanish," explained her neighbor, Maria.

Suppose *you* heard for the first time about a great and terrible giant who every morning strode out in the field and "dared" some one to come and fight with him; the giant had heavy armor on and carried a mighty sword

and a spear. And about a shepherd boy who "took up the dare," and who had no armor and nothing to fight with but a leather sling and a few pebbles that he picked up out of a brook. And suppose you did not know whether the giant would kill the boy or the boy kill the giant. Well, Carmita did *not* know and breathless indeed was she until she found out.

Maria tells her that every day there will be a story—some even finer and more exciting than the giant story—and that after a while when she knows English she can read these stories for herself out of a book, "La Señorita" has.

Little Maria tells Carmita that she has been in school three weeks and she already knows forty-five words. Not only how to read them, but what they mean; and she always understands what the teacher wants them to do. All this knowledge makes her feel quite grand

and old, and she tells Carmita encouragingly that she will soon learn, in such a way that Carmita feels very young indeed.

It is very interesting when the children are called on to recite. They love to do it and have such good memories that it is no trouble to them to learn. Carmita hears beautiful words that she never heard before. Maria tells her they are Bible words. "These lessons," she says, "you feel in your heart, the other lessons you feel only with the head."

The "other" lessons, are reading and writing (these Porto Rican children write beautifully and always neatly, which is, of course, not saying that you do not) and arithmetic.

The teachers have a rather hard time with the reading lessons, for, you see, the "readers" were made for you, and they do not suit these always-summer little children very well. There are so many things they have never seen—the lesson to-day is about a snowstorm

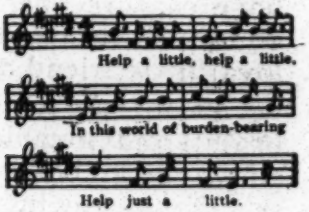
and icicles—and the children have never seen snow or ice, so the teacher has a hard time explaining. She hopes some day to have books that will suit the climate.

Then there is a sewing lesson. This is great fun, and so is the time spent among the flower beds in the courtyard. There are no signs to "keep off the grass" because there is no grass to keep off of. For some reason the Porto Ricans do not let even a spear of grass grow in their gardens.

Everything charms Carmita; most of all her bright and kind and smiling teachers—who have captured her warm little heart once for all, and henceforth she will be their true and loyal little friend as well as an eager pupil.

As for the teachers—as they look at the bright and lovable and attractive faces, the active little bodies of their pupils; as they see them growing more truthful and honest and kind under their teaching, they are glad

of the day when they decided to teach in Porto Rico—in the schools of the Woman's Board of Home Missions. As for you little American children, it is *your* part to help the Woman's Board to keep up these schools in Porto Rico, and to open new ones, so that not Carmita only, but many other children of the summer land by the sea may "go to school."



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